

With Christmas
Greetings . . .

Janie W. Foster

Golden Gleams

By Ida Hurlley

Brinkburn Farm
Amherst, N. S.

A
819.4
H948 go

GOLDEN GLEAMS

DO YOU ever realize how strangely some of the days of one's life stand out in one's memory with a golden radiance that seems quite out of proportion to their importance; days, that while passing seemed to have no significance, we find in after years are astonishingly clear and bright in memory.

Let my Christmas gift to you this year recall one or two of these. Away at the farthest end of grandfather's farm, there was a sheep pasture which had been run over by fire and afterwards grew up thick with raspberry canes. Here we came for several years to pick the fruit. Let us live one of those days over.

Burt and I are up before the day is aired, eat our breakfast in haste, and start for the farm with our little tin pails swinging in our hands. Dew thick on the grass wets our feet, and the smell of the clover is wafted to us on the wings of the morning breeze.

We go along in silence, ever our chatter subdued by the beauty and peace and freshness of the world, and listen as we go to the meadow lark in a near-by field splitting his little throat in an ecstasy of song.

We come presently to the lane at the farm, a dear familiar walk, only used by intimates and members of the family, the real formal entrance being up the hill. Down this half wild pathway we always love to linger. There were strawberries in the fence corners ripe before any others; raspberries too and wild gooseberries so sour and prickly that they skinned our tongues and made our stomachs ache but seldom got leave to ripen, but were crunched by the teeth of the small pirates seeking for booty who roamed up and down the lane. Along it there were two or three butternut trees, always in

their season laden with nuts to tempt us to loiter, and it was a regular habit, as much a matter of course as opening the gate, that as you passed each tree you kept on the lookout for fallen nuts, or knocked one down and cracked it on the large flat stone conveniently placed under each tree. Dear me! what fingers the juice from the outside shell gave us. Our lips too they stained brown, and our linen pinafores were spattered with the stain and got us many scoldings; but only half hearted ones after all, for our mothers before us had many a time followed that same old pathway.

Then came the lime kiln, about the use of which our ideas were vague. Our delight however in its huge fire of tamarac logs, which grandfather used to light every fall was keen and the lurid glare from its outlet in the top, which illumined the cool dark nights was a signal to which we loved to respond.

Surreptitious feasts provided for by raids on the potato field, the corn patch and even, at propitious times when grandfather left the kiln in charge of uncle on the hen house, were sometimes mysteriously hinted at by the eldest of us.

When we passed the big haw tree we had only a straight path to the house door and as we are in a great hurry this morning we do not linger. Grandmother gives us another breakfast and then we go around the fences till we come to the berry patch. We begin by placing a large green basswood leaf in each of our pails to keep the berries off the tin and then put the pails under a clump of bushes out of the sun. With great ardor we begin to pick into our cups. We are very anxious to carry home enough berries for tea. We keep on for awhile very diligently, only occasionally putting a berry into our mouths, and with great ceremony empty the cups several times into the green lined pails. It gets hotter and hotter; the breeze dies down and even our big straw hats shelter us inadequately. By the time the sun is directly overhead we are dead beat and seizing our pails and lunch we make a bee-line for the bottom of the hill. The berry bushes grow all down the side in the sunshine, but at the foot there is a fringe of

trees and a little brook which merrily wends its way over stones, between grassy banks, chattering its satisfaction at its release from the flour mill where it is harnessed and made to grind the flour.

We pull off our big hats and sit down on the mossy bank. Across the sunny pasture we see the heat quivering in the stillness and with a sigh of relief stretch ourselves out to listen to the sounds of summer: the cool murmur of the running water, the drowsy hum of the bees, the clank of the mill. A robin says "tut, tut" as he flies, off and over in a distant field a cow-bell sounds fitfully. The cows, too, are taking their noonday rest and the bell is silent, save when a particularly energetic fly touches the old leader in a tender spot.

A wail from Burt makes me open my eyes, to see him energetically spitting out a mouthful of berries he has been getting surreptitiously out of his pail. I know what has happened but still say, "What is the matter?" As soon as he is through spluttering he says laconically, "berry-bug". We look in his pail to find the little dog in the manger that one never sees eating berries, I don't know whether it does or not, but it crawls over them and leaves its nasty odor and spoils them for others. We can't find it, so conclude it has either travelled off or Burt got it into his mouth with the berries (at which he makes another wry face). We eat our lunch and wish we had more. We feel strangely disinclined to leave our shady refuge and go again up the sun-bathed hill.

Gone alas is our ardent desire to supply Mother with berries for tea. We yield ourselves to the influence of the hottest hour of the day and drowse away on the grass until a shaft of sunlight gradually pierces under the trees and we sit up suddenly to discover that the sun is on its way down the sky to the western gates and we must bestir ourselves. We lazily begin to mount upwards. As we reach the berries and begin to pick in a desultory fashion, Burt says, "Gosh, its hot. I believe this hill is a

volcano and the fire will burst through just now". We pick in one direction and presently find ourselves both looking longingly over the fence at the road that leads towards home. Burt looks at me and I look at Burt. "Say ! lets cut it," he breaks out and we crawl through the fence without another word. Oh ! it is hot. The dust rises at every step and fills our eyes, noses and mouths. We meet a team of big farm horses: they can't be seen for dust until they are close. The young farmer that drives them calls to us "Been berrying, youngsters?" We say "yes" and he asks us why we don't wait until it is cooler before we go home. We explain that we must be home for tea with the berries. He looks quizzically at the messy berries at the bottom of our pails, nods and goes on. Burt is fat, and the long two-mile walk plays him out: so when we come to the bridge over the little creek about a quarter of a mile from home, we are very willing to rest. We clamber down under the bridge to a spot we have often sat in before. We each settle on a big stone with our pails beside us and, pulling off our shoes and stockings, paddle our feet back and forth in the water. What bliss after the dusty road ! No one can possibly see us and we splash and puddle as much as we like. There are very few berries now in our pails as we have regaled ourselves with them occasionally.

I say, "Let's finish them and we can wash our pails and take them home clean." Burt expostulates, "Mother will expect them for tea." With my usual logic, I say "I'm sure neither Mother nor Father will eat these, they are so messy, and if we are to eat them we might as well do it now." We therefore finish them up and then wade out into the centre of the little stream and send the big bass-wood leaves from the bottom of each pail adown with the current. Mine is wrecked on a projecting stone but Burt's sails gaily on out of our line of vision. We wash our pails carefully, put on our shoes and stockings after some struggles with our wet feet, which we finally have to wave in the air to dry, leave the bridge and trudge on home. Mother meets us at the door.

How cool the house is; how grateful after the glare of the dusty roads are the darkened rooms with their lowered blinds. Such red little faces we have, dirty too, with the dust on them turned to mud with perspiration. Mother takes the empty pails without one word about their emptiness; and leads us off for a good wash and clean clothes. With what satisfaction we sink into our seats at the tea-table: there are berries for tea after all though not of our getting, and we attack our saucers quite undeterred by the quantity we have already made away with during the day. Father asks, "How many berries did the children get?" Mother looks at him and smiles, then with the smile still in her eyes turns to us, shakes her head and says, "greedy children!" Dear Mother, so anxious to praise, so reluctant to blame!

"Oh scented summer of long ago:

"Oh vanished day with your gleam of gold."

Many of these happy memories are of the woods. It would be hard to say when we loved them most. They delighted us even in winter when the snow lay thick on mossy stones and logs, filled up the hollows and clothed the trees with a mantle of ermine, when all the noisy little brooks are ice-bound and the chick-a-dee, the bluejay and an occasional crow are the sole representatives of the summer throngs.

See it as the sun sinks to the west some short winter afternoon. The sky is a glorious study in yellows, deep orange at the horizon. The boles of the trees become luminous and the tops are silhouetted against the sky in a delicate tracery. There is an air of hushed waiting, of expectancy and of mystery that appeals to one in a different way than Spring with its promise, Summer with its luxury of growth, or Autumn with its glorious fulfilment. Then later when the days begin to get warm and the nights are cold and still, some one suddenly discovers the sap is running and the sugar making begins.

Behind grandfather's house was a grove of tress, mostly maples, called "the sugar bush" and here we all flocked, every child belonging to the family and as many more of our playmates as Grandmother would tolerate. We knew if we took too many we ran the risk of being sent with them about our business. Some of the uncles used now to make a round of the bush, tap the trees, insert the little trough or spile as it was called, whittled out of pine, into the cut and put a pail underneath to catch the drip. Then he selected a spot for a camp, erected a shelter of evergreens on a pole frame and gathered a supply of wood. The great iron kettles were got out and scoured clean, the frame erected to sling them from in the centre of the fire and sugar making was fairly begun. In the early morning while the crust would bear, before the top of the snow was softened by the heat of the sun, Uncle and as many of us as happened to be on hand visited the trees and emptied the sap. When the flow first commenced two large pails held it but as the weather became warmer the flow increased until nuncle would make his morning rounds with one of the oxen harnessed to a sled and a small barrel on it to hold the sap. I remember one of those Spring mornings Bob and I wanted to go on the sled with uncle but he was cross and would have none of us so we ran across to the camp to be on hand when he finished.

Presently we saw old Buck the ox coming along the trail at a clumsy gallop, a wild look in his usually peaceful eye and unnie, a sorry sight, drenched with sap, standing on the sled belaboring the poor old ox with a tree branch and using some very emphatic language. Buck had got off the the beaten track, stepped into a hole and in his floundering tipped the sled over and more than half the barrel of sap had gone over uncle. We remarked to each other that uncle was sweet outside and sour within and then fled before the baleful glare of his eye.

When the buds begin to swell the sap gets bitter and then some night word goes around we can come to the last "Sugaring Off." The huge pot of sap boiling mer-

rily over a brisk fire of dry boughs was always the centre of attraction. It was general property and we all did as we liked with it. Some of us dropped eggs into the boiling mass, cooked them hard, and presently fishing them out with a long spoon, peeled and ate them. Others did the same with apples if any could be procured that had survived the winter, running all sorts of risks of being spattered with the boiling sap. A portion of it was ladled out after it had been clarified and handed over to those who wanted to make taffy. Some wanted it boiled sufficiently to make hard cakes when poured into moulds and cooled and a few elected to have their share after it was stirred briskly until it formed granules and became a coarse brown granulated sugar. Grandmother stood all the while in the shelter of the little arbor, her wind-blown hair in curly disorder around her face, calling admonitions about the hot sap and the fire.

Everywhere was the sound of running water and usually a robin on a tall elm somewhere near sounded "the Assembly" to the birds. There was a stir all through the woods, a balmy soft feeling in the air and a smell of mould from the high spots where the snow had gone that made the sap in our young veins stir like that in the trees. While the tender spring twilight faded into an enfoldng darkness which made again of the woods a thing of mystery, while the elders packed up and put away the sugar-making things for another year, we, with imaginary tomahawks and very realistic warhoops, enacted an Indian Massacre, circled around the fire, which for the time was an unfortunate settlers dwelling, and scalped each other with relish.

Little recked we as we stumbled homeward through the darkness, the younger portion of us holding fast to grandmother's hand or some part of her raiment, that the toes of our boots were burned red kicking the fire into position, that our clothes had mysterious holes to be accounted for in the morning, that our tongues were blistered with premature tastings or that our faces were black and a general smell of smoke

and sap prevailed the whole. We only knew we were steeped in sugar to the eyes, that we wanted nothing more, to eat for a long time and that it was time to be in bed.

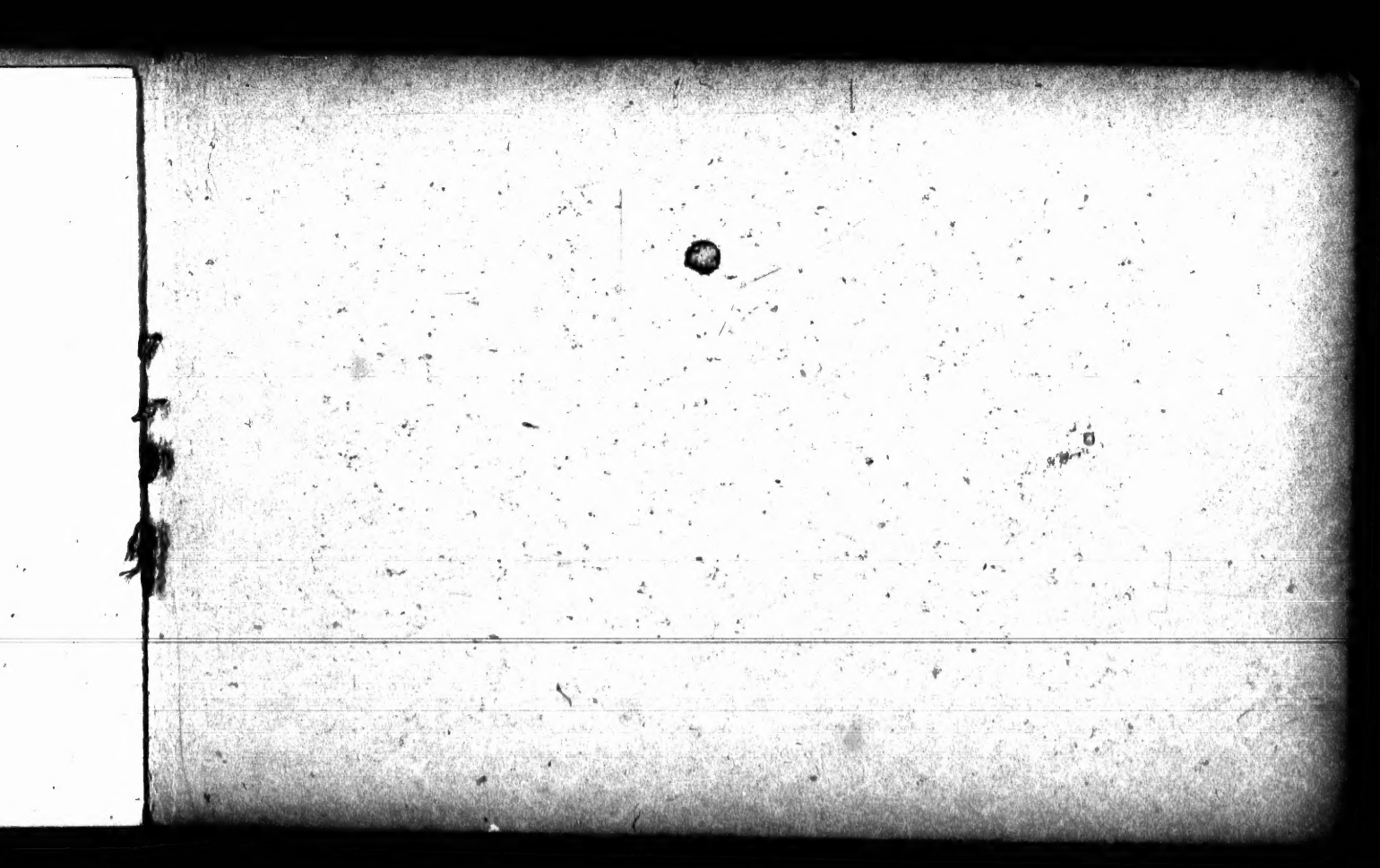
These are good days that we are living, in spite of the war and its sorrows; days of progress and knowledge and fulfillment; and when we are ripening in character, and are accomplishing our life work in even an approach to what we have set ourselves, they are better days than those we look back to so wistfully. But a golden radiance encircles those dear days of the past with their carefree happiness and first impressions when we were sheltered from unhappiness and error by love now gone beyond the stars.

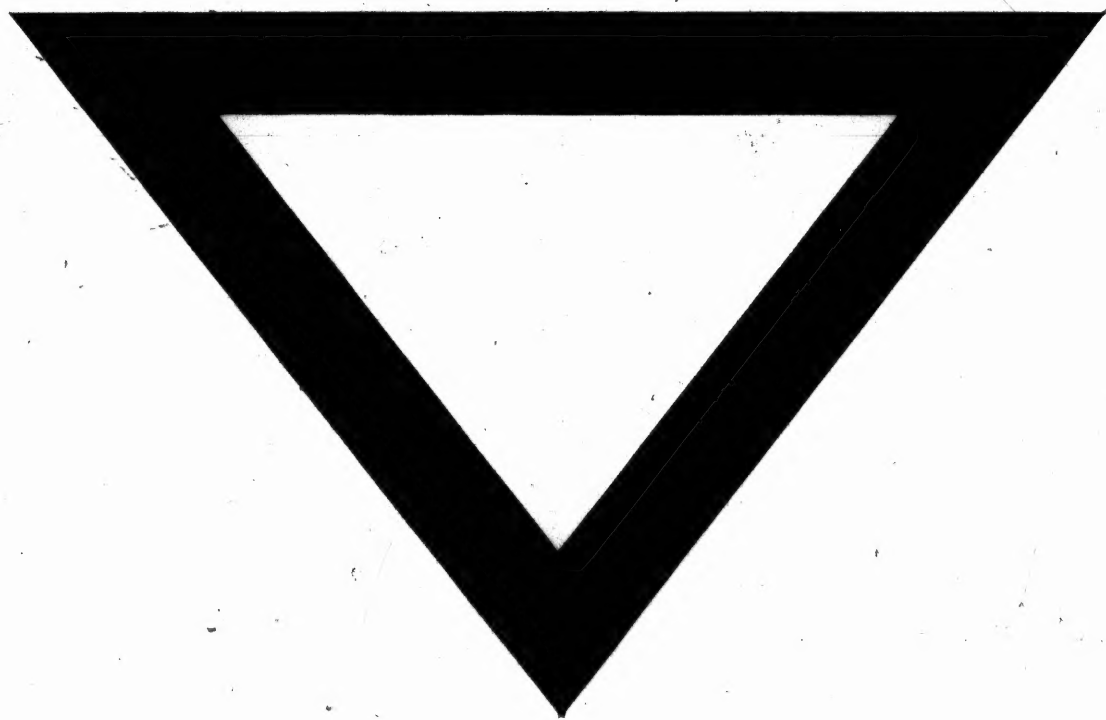
I was driving lately on a road that winds around a beautiful bay of Northumberland Straits. For an hour I had been going along through the valley and just before I turned off it on the home road I paused on the top of a hill to look back over the varied landscape I had travelled through. The green dykelands blue circled by the sea, the velvet fields sloping to the water; the white farm houses tree girt and home-like, the spruce-clad shore of Tormentine with a purple veil flung over it, all lay like a huge picture before me. The tide was coming in and over the yellow salt marshes long fingers of blue water were creeping up and overhead some white gulls chattering like boys just free from school, circled and wheeled, the sunlight flashing like silver from their plumage. The long red road I had come by wound in and out down below and, as I touched up the horse, I thought, "It is more beautiful from here than when I was going through it."

Perhaps it is so with these memories which we now gaze at through the purple haze of distance but nevertheless we can be thankful for the golden gleams they make in the record of our lives.

IDA, HURTLEY

BRINEBURN FARM
AMHERST, N. S.





1. 10. 11

2.

10. 11. 11

6.

10. 11. 11

10. 11. 11